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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 004305

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PHUM PREL CO

SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS CONDITION TALKS ON IMPROVED PROTECTION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS ON URIBE APOLOGY

Classified By: Political Counselor John S. Creamer

Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

¶11. (C) Interior and Justice Minister Fabio Valencia met November 10 with civil society, the international community, and Defense Ministry representatives to discuss the GOC's protection program for human rights defenders. Human rights groups challenged the GOC's commitment to protect their workers and called for rigorous action. They proposed a joint GOC-civil society project to develop a more effective program, but conditioned negotiations on a formal apology by President Uribe. Rafael Bustamante, Director of the Ministry of Interior and Justice's (MOIJ) Social Protection Program, told us the GOC believed Valencia had met the demands for high-level assurances of GOC support with a November 11 press release.

Civil Society Calls for Presidential Apology

¶12. (U) On November 10, Interior and Justice Minister Fabio Valencia met with members of civil society, the international community, and the Defense Ministry to discuss the GOC's protection program for human rights defenders. Valencia reiterated the GOC's commitment to protect all citizens and guarantee human rights, citing security provided to 1510 human rights workers in the first nine months of 2008. Human rights representatives disputed the GOC's political will, claiming GOC officials -- including President Uribe -- had publicly linked their work to terrorism. They detailed threats and incidents against their staff, and said no agreement on improving the protection program could be reached without a prior apology by Uribe.

¶13. (U) In an open letter addressed to Valencia on November 13, the human rights platform Coordination Colombia-Europe-United States (CCEEU) called for a project to develop and implement broader security for human rights defenders. The letter reiterated that negotiations on an improved protection program were contingent on an official apology. The human rights groups also claimed GOC comments had incited a climate of hate which led to the targeting of human rights defenders.

¶14. (C) Rafael Bustamante, Director of the MOIJ's Social Protection Program, told us the GOC met the human rights groups' demands for high-level assurances of with the MOIJ's November 11 press release. The press release praised the work of groups dedicated to the legitimate work of protecting individual and collective rights, and affirmed the GOC's commitment to investigate any threats against human rights

defenders. Bustamante said an additional intervention on the part of the President would be unlikely.

15. (SBU) A United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) representative told us some human rights groups contend they are receiving increased threats as a direct result of GOC denunciations of certain human rights groups. She said the groups are justified in calling for the highest levels of the GOC to publicly acknowledge its responsibility and intention to defend their workers. Still, she said the insistence on an Uribe apology prior to negotiating new protection measures was designed to humiliate the president and was politically motivated.

Purging Intelligence Files

16. (C) CCEEU also called for the implementation of the UNHCHR recommendation to review and purge military intelligence files of hits on human rights defenders. In the same press release, the MOIJ said the Inspector General (Procuraduria) had signaled its intention to continue to work with the MOD to eliminate references to human rights groups in intelligence files based solely on their human rights work..

17. (C) The UNHCHR representative told us the UNHCHR had seen little visible progress on the issue since the UNHCHR reached agreement with the GOC in April 2007, but that it appeared the project was proceeding within the GOC. Bustamante told us the work was moving forward, but it had not yet concluded. Local UNHCHR director Javier Hernandez told us he suspects military intelligence continues to harass some human rights groups, including sending them threatening emails, but said he has no hard proof.

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